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RACHMANINOV

Piano Concerto No. 2

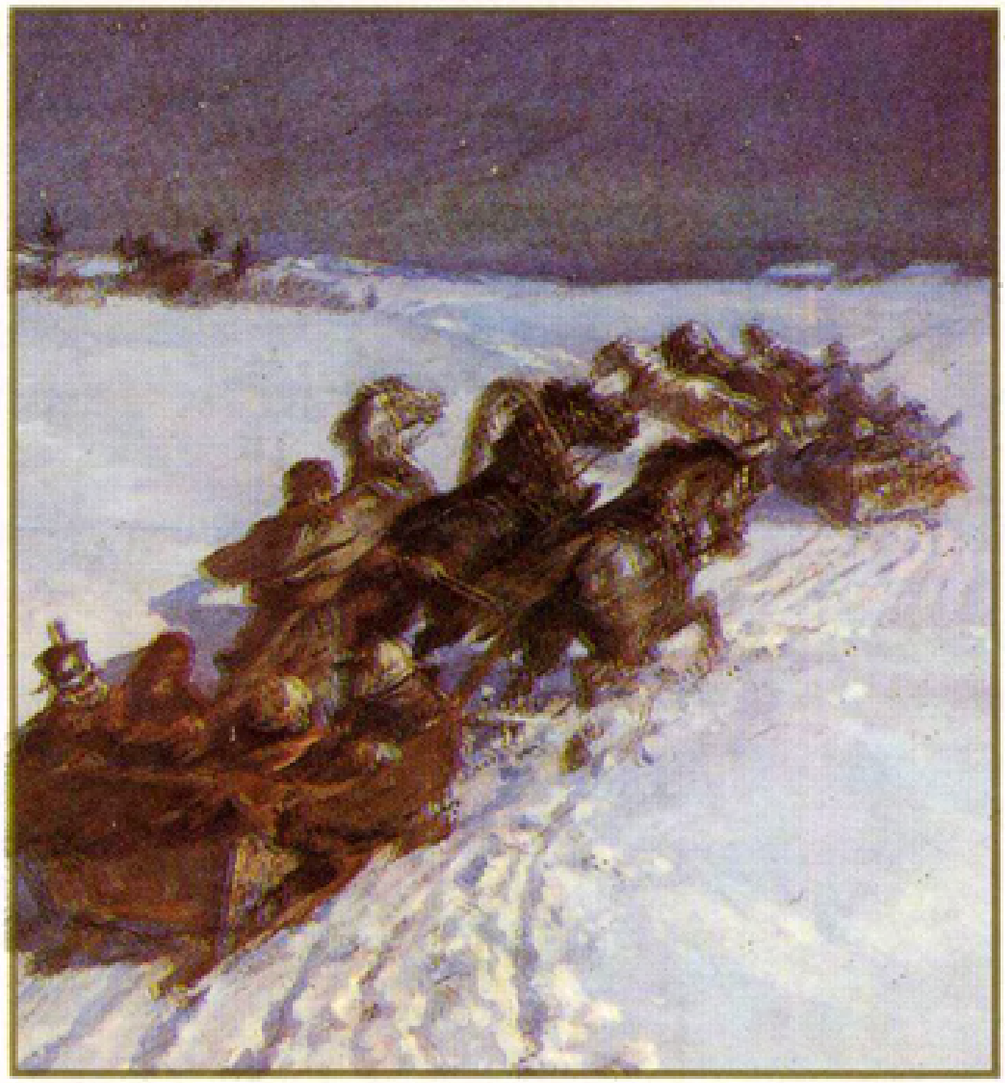
Klavierkonzert • Concerto pour piano

Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini

Jenő Jandó

Budapest Symphony Orchestra

György Lehel



Sergey Rachmaninov (1873 - 1943)

Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, Opus 18

Moderato
Adagio sostenuto
Allegro scherzando

Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Opus 43

The Russian composer and pianist Sergey Rachmaninov was born in 1873, the son of aristocratic parents. His father's improvidence, however, was to lead to a change in the fortunes of the family, when increasing debts led to the sale of one estate after another, followed by removal to an apartment in St. Petersburg. It was in that city that Rachmaninov, at the age of nine, entered the Conservatory on a scholarship.

The subsequent separation of his parents and failure in general subject examinations was to bring about Rachmaninov's move to the Moscow Conservatory, where he was under the strict supervision of Nikolay Zverev. In Moscow he was to win considerable success as time went on, both as a performer and as a composer, although it was the second of these roles that seemed likely to be the more important.

The Communist Revolution of 1917 was to bring many changes. While some musicians remained in Russia, others chose temporary or permanent exile. Rachmaninov took the latter course, and found himself obliged to rely on his very considerable gifts as a pianist in order to support himself and his family. At the same time he was to continue working as a conductor. Composition inevitably

had to take second or third place, and it was principally as a concert pianist, one of the greatest of his time, that he became known to audiences.

In 1897 Rachmaninov's first symphony had been performed in St. Petersburg under the direction of Glazunov, who, according to his wife's later account, was drunk at the time. The work was badly played and received a hostile critical reception. César Cui, indeed, a surviving member of the Mightly Handful, the five leading Russian nationalist composers, described it as a student programme symphony of the Seven Plagues of Egypt, an unflattering judgement that contributed to the composer's depression and loss of confidence.

The C Minor Piano Concerto was written in 1900 and 1901 and is dedicated to Dr. Nikolay Dahl, under whom Rachmaninov had undergone a course of psychiatric treatment that restored his creative urge. The second and third movements of a work that was to prove to be one of the most popular romantic piano concertos, were completed in the summer of 1900 and the first movement in the following year. In November 1901 it was performed in Moscow under the direction of Rachmaninov's cousin, Alexander Ziloti, with the composer as soloist and was received with the greatest enthusiasm. The work has retained its position in the repertoire, although it has at the same time served as a model for regrettably vulgar imitations that have nothing of the innovative inspiration of the original.

The first movement of the concerto opens with eight dramatic chords from the piano, followed by the first theme from the strings, accompanied by piano arpeggios. The second subject, played by the soloist, is introduced by a phrase on the viola, rhapsodic style by the pianist in a development and in a recapitulation to which the soloist adds an initially martial element.

In the slow movement the orchestra moves gently from the key of C minor to the remote key of E major, in which the soloist enters with characteristic figuration. The principal theme is introduced by flute and clarinet, before being taken up by the soloist. The more rapid central section of the movement suggests the mood of a scherzo, leading to a powerful cadenza.

With scarcely a pause the orchestra introduces the final movement, a further cadenza leading to the first theme, with a second announced by the oboe and violas. Both are treated rhapsodically by the soloist, the second theme forming a romantic contrast to the more energetic rhythm of the first.

The Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini was written in the space of a few weeks in 1934 and is based on the theme used by Paganini as the basis of a set of solo violin variations that form the last of his 24 Caprices. The melody was to serve other composers, such as Brahms and Liszt, and has continued to do so.

To Rachmaninov the Paganini theme suggested the complementary use of another, more ancient melody, that of the sequence that once formed part of the Latin Requiem Mass, the Dies irae. This second melody, which Rachmaninov had used appropriately enough in The Isle of the Dead, was to appear again in his final work, the Symphonic Dances of 1940. It had served other 19th century composers as a symbol of death, whether in the Symphonie fantastique of Berlioz, in Liszt's Totentanz or, in Russia, in Tchaikovsky's Third Suite.

Although the Rhapsody seems in origin to have had no programmatic significance, the composer provided a narrative explanation for Fokin's ballet Paganini, the choreographic version of the legend according to which the great violinist had sold his soul, Faust-like, to the Devil in return for perfection as a violinist

Budapest Symphony Orchestra

The Budapest Symphony Orchestra, part of the Hungarian Television and Broadcasting Organisation, was established after the Second World War and under its Principal Conductor György Lehel has won some distinction. Through its frequent broadcasts and its recordings it has become widely known, and its tours have taken it to the countries of Eastern and Western Europe as well as to the United States of America and Canada. The orchestra has worked with some of the most distinguished conductors and soloists of our time.

Gyorgy Lehel

The distinguished Hungarian conductor Gyorgy Lehel was born in Budapest in 1926 and studied composition with Pál Kadosa and composition with László Somogyi, making his début as a conductor in 1947. He was appointed principal conductor and music director of the Budapest Symphony Orchestra in 1962 and appeared in 1968 with the orchestra at the Cheltenham Festival, where he conducted first performances of music by Gordon Crosse and Elizabeth Maconchy.

In a busy career Lehel has performed extensively in Hungary and abroad, in Western and Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, the United States of America, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. His many recordings include a considerable amount of music by Liszt and Bartok, and he has long been known for the great encouragement he has consistently given to younger Hungarian composers. The many awards he has received include the Liszt Prize in Hungary and an Honorary Doctorate of Music from the Chicago Conservatory.

and for the love of a woman (romantic rumours that Paganini himself had been at pains to contradict). The Dies irae is taken to represent the Devil, while the original theme is Paganini himself. Certainly the variations that make up the Rhapsody include episodes of lyrical tenderness, forming a central section of romantic intensity, followed by what might seem the brilliant diablerie of the last six of the 24 variations.

Jenő Jandó

Jenő Jandó was born at Pécs, in south Hungary, in 1952. He started to learn the piano when he was seven and later studied at the Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music under Katalin Nemes and Pal Kadosa, becoming assistant to the latter on his graduation in 1974. Jandó has won a number of piano competitions in Hungary and abroad, including first prize in the 1973 Hungarian Piano Concours and a first prize in the chamber music category at the Sydney International Piano Competition in 1977. In addition to his many appearances in Hungary, he has played widely abroad in Eastern and Western Europe, in Canada and in Japan.

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Playing Time : 57'46"

RACHMANINOV

Piano Concerto No. 2

Klavierkonzert • Concerto pour piano

Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini

Jenö Jandó, Piano
Budapest Symphony Orchestra
György Lehel, Conductor

Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 18

1	Moderato	(11:08)
2	Adagio sostenuto	(11:17)
3	Allegro scherzando	(11:28)
4	Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op. 43*	(23:53)

Recorded at the Italian Institue in Budapest from 9th to 10th February and from 5th to 7th April, 1988.
Producers: Monika Feszler (Nos. 1-3)
Jeno Simon (No. 4)
Engineer: Istvan Zakarias
Music Notes: Keith Anderson
*Variations 10-14 conducted by Gyula Nemeth

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